

## How should Dion sell his platform to voters?

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### ARE THERE ELEMENTS OF STEPHANE DION'S PLATFORM, RELEASED MONDAY, THAT HE SHOULD BE EMPHASIZING OVER THE GREEN SHIFT?



**Greg Lyle** (*former chief of staff for premiers Gordon Campbell and Gary Filmon*): As a communications document, the platform is disappointing. The focus is on a richer, fairer and greener Canada. Nothing wrong with that but the goals are too broad, too 30,000 feet. They are so general they are difficult to believe.

The Liberals need to connect with swing voters – who are not really interested in the picture. They just need one reason to believe their life will get better if Stéphane Dion is Prime Minister.

There is lots of ammunition in this plan to do that. Personally, I would focus on a group of ideas that give people a fairer break. Lower tuition so everyone can afford a good start in life. More child care to give women an equal shot with men. More for immigration to ensure New Canadians get a fair chance at the Canadian dream.

Alternatively, they can focus on a government that will do something where the Tories offer nothing. More on the environment, more on health care, more on jobs. That means offering more intrusive policies the Tories won't follow and then using each policy to make the general point that Liberals believe the federal government has a job to do and Tories don't.

Speaking of which, does no one in that campaign remember Jean Chrétien? They could take a few lessons. Chrétien offered jobs, jobs, jobs and stole the economy as an issue from the Conservatives. The new Liberal plan has a jobs plank, but they call it "Bolster the Manufacturing Sector." That one headline really makes my point. They are not talking with swing voters, they are talking down to voters.



**Scott Reid** (*former communications director for Paul Martin*): For good or for ill, Mr. Dion has anchored his electoral appeal around a large, galvanizing idea: that we must better balance our economic prosperity and environmental health. The Green Shift is the policy plank manifestation of that idea. To pretend he can simply walk away from it is naive at best, dumb at worst. That said, it was a mistake to permit it to be understood initially as a tax increase when in fact it represents one of the healthiest tax cuts in recent memory. But, hey, that's life in the big city. If whining about nasty, distorting Conservative ads was going to turn things around, we'd be winning by now. The question is how to get some damn votes – and correcting mistaken impressions about the Green Shift is the steepest possible path to victory currently available to the Liberals. So what to do if you can't run on or run from a perverted public notion of your core policy offering? Go big picture. And go at your opponent. First, talk about values and sell your approach as contrasted with Stephen Harper's. People understand that the economy versus the environment is a false choice. Say that. And say that Mr. Harper doesn't get that. Then move on.

Second, do what, to be fair, the Liberals did today. Emphasize your fiscal record and the critical importance of prudent management of the nation's pocketbook. Forget the platform. We have a deteriorating economy and a near deficit. Run some ads that lay that at Harper's feet. The bottom line is this: the platform isn't a message. It doesn't read like a message. It wasn't constructed as a message. It won't turn into a message. Green Shift or not, the challenge remains the same: give Canadians a reason to reject the Conservatives and then consider voting Liberal. There's a reason Mr. Harper's support remains stuck around 37 per cent. People worry about him. Leverage that. Work that. Combine doubts about his character with worries about the economy. And don't worry about the platform.

*Gerald Caplan will return*